# Tasting God

*"When the good God is in the heart, he does everything there … when someone has once tasted God, he continuously comes back to him. It is a capital that he has in his soul and to which he is constantly brought back to his center. He will love to converse with him." (Fr. Colin, A Founder Speaks 63.3)*

What is Fr. Colin referring to here? He wanted the novices to have a spiritual experience of God that would blossom into a relationship to which these young men would return and nurture in prayer as adults. That is what Jesus envisioned for each of his disciples when he said, "I no longer call you slaves but friends." (Jn. 15:15)

There is no doubt in my mind that with those words, Jesus remembered with fondness when, in the cool of the afternoon in the Garden of Eden and before the Fall, Adam and Eve would walk with the Lord in easy friendship. That memory provides the backdrop for when Jesus calls Peter and his brother Andrew, who were casting a net into the sea. (Mt. 4:18-22) We learn that Jesus sees the two brothers. The Greek word here translated as seeing is better understood as Jesus looking at them intently, as if studying them, and with fondness. Note that Jesus was walking alone by the Sea of Galilee, a sad consequence of Original Sin. This vignette reveals that God's dream to walk with us human beings in easy friendship had never died over the centuries but had grown in intensity. We human beings like to talk about our search for God. The reality is that God is searching for us. It is God who longs to walk with us in easy friendship, as had been the case when he walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the Fall.

I will return to walking with the Lord in easy friendship, but for now, I want to return to our theme and reflect on how to understand what Fr. Colin means when he speaks about tasting God. Psalm 34:8 puts it this way, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." What does that mean? How do we do that?

How is God good? There are many ways to describe God's goodness, which is revealed in his abiding love for us. God's loving presence is gifted to us at conception, extending through human death and beyond.

I like how Archbishop Paul S. Overde expands on this. He writes, "We are not always aware of His love; sometimes we feel that God is absent. But, the fact is: God is with us always, through every moment and phase of our life: in joy and sorrow, in our questioning and doubting, in our lukewarmness and even in our denial when we sin and turn away. He remains forever faithful to us. His promise is clear: "I am with you always, even to the end of this age." (Mt 28: 28) Moreover, the goodness of the Lord is made more explicit in the promise He makes to each of us who belong to Him by Baptism: the promise of eternal life, living in union with Him forever.[1]

Yes, God intends that we live forever with Him in heaven." We believe that because God sent his only Son to take away the barriers to making God's promise a reality. He did this by defeating sin and death as we proclaim immediately after the consecration, "Dying you destroyed our death; Rising you restored our life." All that is included when we receive the Risen Lord at Holy Communion. It is the inspiration for the hymn, "Taste and See the Goodness of the Lord."[2]

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[1] Loverde, Bishop Paul, "Taste and See the Goodness of the Lord," Catholic Podcast, https://catholicexchange.com/taste-and-see-the-goodness-of-the-lord/.

[2] Toward the end of his life, Fr. Colin experienced a strong devotion to the Eucharist and to the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. His love of the Eucharist finds expression at Marist with how our students worship at school Masses. Whether they serve as musicians, Readers, Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, servers, members of

The refrain quoted above is thought to have originated with King David. Tradition believes that he wrote Psalm 34. He is telling the people of Israel not to take his word that God is good but to experience and know for themselves that God is good. King David encourages them and us to taste, meaning, ponder, contemplate, and savor life experiences that stand out as carrying God's presence, providence, and goodness to us. They are mountaintop experiences that reveal how satisfyingly good God is.

St. Peter has that in mind when he writes, "You have tasted that the Lord is good." We can't rely only on the testimony of others. We must taste and see for ourselves that God is good. That is what Fr. Colin hoped the novices would experience during their novitiate, expecting that this would lead them to walk with the Lord in easy friendship from then on. That is a nice way of imagining what we do when we pray. We are walking with the Lord, who is making good on his desire that we no longer see ourselves as slaves but as his friends.

Our students identify participating in the different retreats, especially Emmaus and the Bearing Witness Class, mission trips, and theology classes, as compelling experiences of God's presence and action in their lives. We can call those experiences mountaintop experiences. Mountaintops are where heaven and earth meet. They are privileged places where God and humanity commune with each other. Our students' experiences are like being on a mountaintop because they are charged with God's presence, providence, and goodness. Our students can't rely only on the testimony of others as to God's goodness. They must taste and see for themselves that God is good. Fr. Colin wants for them what he wanted for his novices: that they, too, would taste and see the goodness of the Lord during their years at Marist. The expectation is that these experiences would lead them to walk in easy friendship with the Lord. As I said, that is a nice way of imagining what we do when we pray. Fr. Colin puts it this way, "He or she will love to converse with Him." Same thing.

When leaving the culture of Marist, our students will be entering into a secular one that is decidedly antagonistic toward any talk about the transcendent. More than 50 years ago, the great theologian Karl Rahner warned that would be the case. He said, “The Christian of the future will be a mystic, or he will not exist at all.” In other words, believers must walk in easy friendship with the Lord. Without a relationship with the Lord that is real, dynamic, and central in the life of a believer, faith will eventually wither and die. Today, around 70% of Catholics do not practice their faith. I would say that the statistics prove Karl Rahner is right. Jesus seems to have foreseen this development when he said, "When the Son of Man comes again, will he find any faith on the earth." (Luke 18:8)

Let's listen again to what Fr. Colin said, "*When the good God is in the heart, he does everything there … when someone has once tasted God, he continuously comes back to him. It is a capital that he has in his soul and to which he is constantly brought back as to his center. He will love to converse with him."* That could easily pass for a description of a mystic. A mystic seeks religious knowledge or experience through knowledge, prayer, deep thought, and contemplation. All of that is included in the words of King David, "Taste and see the goodness of the Lord."

Mary was a mystic because only a mystic could say, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior … The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name." She is echoing verse four of Psalm 34, which reads, "Magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name." She is speaking from personal experience as someone who has tasted and seen the goodness of the Lord. We want our students to have tasted the goodness of the Lord while they are with us. Only then can

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the choir and as members of the assembly (congregation), they take their roles seriously. I am proud of the behavior of the over 1,000 students and the reverence they show during Mass.

they echo the patroness of this school and announce to the world, "The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name."

Because our students have tasted the goodness of the Lord, they can speak about the Lord with conviction, gratitude, and joy. Such sentiments come naturally to those who walk with the Lord in easy friendship.